

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

N.C. Organized Crime

Fact Or Fiction?

BY PAUL BERNISH

Observer Raleigh Bureau

RALEIGH — The specter of "organized crime" is much with us these days, in enormously successful movies like "The Godfather" and "The Velveteen Papers" and in best-selling books like "Honor Thy Father."

And now, according to Attorney General Robert Morgan, there is organized crime right here in North Carolina. "Spreading its tentacles" into such statewide activities as cigarette smuggling, narcotics, prostitution, theft rings and even legitimate business.

Morgan, a Democrat, has issued a series of seven news releases that describe, in sketchy detail, the inroads he says organized crime has made in the state. But he has declined to make public a study that is the basis for his assertions. When asked at a news conference to assess the extent of organized crime, he said that it "isn't all that serious."

So far, hardly anyone — including GOP Gov. Jim Holshouser and state legislators now meeting here — has seen the study, which was done by the Organized Crime Prevention Council under the auspices of Morgan's office.

But the study already has had important ramifications.

It is the basis for two recent recommendations introduced in the General Assembly to give wiretap and no-knock powers to local and state police agencies.

It has led to the creation of a special 12-man unit in the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) which, with \$180,000 in federal money for starters, is supposed to investigate — and convict, if possible — professional gangsters who may have gained a foothold in North Carolina.

The news releases have served to keep Morgan, one of the state's most aspiring Democratic politicians and a possible United States Senate candidate next year, in the public limelight at a time when Republicans have gained control of the governor's mansion and several other top state jobs.

Assistant Attorney General Howard Satsky, who prepared most of the study, emphasizes that it serves a useful purpose. "A lot of things we say can't be proven and a lot of it has already been reported," Satsky said in an interview. "Our purpose was just to tie it all together in one package."

Others, however, including some legislators who are interested in crime matters, are skeptical that the study has really been the close, hard look into organized crime that the attorney general says it is.

"You reporters have been played like a violin by Morgan," comments a top official of the Holshouser Administration who asked not to be identified. "If there's organized crime to the extent Morgan says there is, we've seen no evidence of it."

What information gathered by the council that has been released is in fact short on names, places and dates.

Satsky, a 27-year-old University of North Carolina Law School graduate who's been on the attorney general's staff since 1969, says those details can't be made public because there were gathered "on a confidential basis."

Much of the information,



Robert Morgan



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used in preparing the study came from local and state police officials who were interviewed by Satsky and others. No real investigations of organized crime were conducted because, Satsky explains, "that was beyond the scope of our work."

That information, say some of the police officials who were contacted by the Organized Crime Council, is based on speculation and rumors, hard evidence on organized criminal activity is difficult to pin down, they say.

"We didn't provide any real evidence of organized (criminal) activity in our area," says Police Chief Don Patterson of Gastonia, who was interviewed for the study. "You hear a lot about organized crime, but it's hard to tell if we have any around here."

Adds Guilford County Sheriff Paul Gibson, "It's hard to say our area has organized crime — though I can say we usually find a bunch of things who may get together to rob some homes."

Satsky insists that the information the police gave him is valuable, if only because local law enforcement officials "have a clearer picture of the situation in their areas."

One of the press releases on the council's findings states that pornography seems to be on the rise in North Carolina, but it adds that police aren't sure whether the rise is directly related to organized crime.

"If you assume it (pornography) is criminal activity," the release states, "there is evidence that a lot of bookstores in North Carolina are owned by the same people but it is not known whether these people are involved in other criminal activities or are members of an organized crime syndicate."

Another release, on the influence of professional gangsters in legitimate businesses, says that "criminal syndicates" are purchasing textile mills around the state and have been "reportedly operating mobile home businesses in North Carolina."

Pressed for more details about organized crimes "infiltration" into legitimate businesses, Satsky said, "You can't really prove that." And Morgan points out: "It's a very tricky business saying that's definitely the case."

The term "organized crime" isn't meant to mean, Morgan and Satsky say, the Mafia or any other well-publicized group. In fact, they add, there is little evidence that the so-called *Cosa Nostra* operates in North Carolina.

Rather, they contend, "organized crime" in North Carolina means regional, autonomous groups of criminals "that operate independently but (which) often assist one another when needed."

Satsky says any headline grabbing use of the term—for example, labeling criminal activity as the work of the "Mafia"—should not be misused on the Attorney General's Office.

Still, Satsky acknowledges that the council's findings have been released in a manner designed to gain extensive play in the state's news media.

A release about each section of the study—for example, the

portion dealing with illegal gambling activities in the state, has been issued separately, usually at well-attended press briefings in Morgan's office on Monday mornings—the day, not incidentally, when many reporters here to cover the legislature have nothing to do because the General Assembly doesn't meet until 8 p.m.

The reason for the staggered releases, Satsky explains, is because "there are study commissions all over the place and usually, when they issue their findings, they do it all at once and no one pays any attention. We feel that by releasing our results a portion at a time, we'd get more coverage and more support."

A few weeks ago, bills were introduced in both houses of the legislature calling for a sweeping reform of North Carolina's criminal code procedures, including provisions for wiretapping and no-knock searches.

Kenneth Pye, dean of Duke University Law School, who helped draw up the legislation, says the two controversial methods were included in the bill because of "the threat of organized crime in North Carolina."

Pye says evidence for that comes directly from Morgan's organized crime study, although he says he himself did not see the study.

The Organized Crime Prevention Council was set up two years ago with \$51,000 in mostly federal anticrime money to look into the existence of organized, professional criminal activity in the state.

"We just accepted the conclusions of someone else's work," Pye notes. "We made no independent study of organized crime ourselves."

Right now, it's far from certain that wiretapping and no-knock will receive legislative approval.

If they do become law, they undoubtedly will be used by the new organized crime unit in the SBI to help in their investigations. The SBI comes under Morgan's control, and though he's said in the past that he is opposed to using wiretap and no-knock methods, his office is expected to lend its weight to passage of both provisions. It is felt they would be specifically useful in pursuing and convicting professional criminals. No-knock would allow the police, armed with a search warrant, to enter a premise unannounced.

Satsky and Morgan emphasize, however, that the study had no legislative or political intent; they insist that any fallout as a result of their work — such as the provisions for no-knock and wiretap authority — is strictly incidental.

But others, like Dean Pye and Sen. Tom Strickland, D-Wayne, who sponsored the bill which includes the two provisions, say there is a clear-cut relation between the study and the two proposals.

Says Strickland, who also has not seen the organized crime study, "You may criticize the study, but we have to proceed on the theory that organized crime is a problem in North Carolina. That's why those two (no-knock and wiretap) provisions are in the bill; how else are you going to stop organized crime in the state?"